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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

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USSR (Western Ukraine)

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Resettlement of Czech Peasants in
Western Ukraine

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1. The region where my family lived in Czechoslovakia was hilly and poor for agriculture, and when Communist agitators promised us heaven on earth if we would resettle in Western Ukraine, we were naturally susceptible. They told us that we would be given free hospital care, labor unions, free schools, etc. Local Communists, such as an uncle of mine who had been a Party member since 1935, and who was almost illiterate, spoke at meetings of the village council, and later were joined by Party agitators from Kiev in the USSR. The property that we owned in our village of Toriski was appraised, including land, buildings, equipment, livestock and the crops that we had planted in the fields and we were given documents showing that we had left this property. We were promised that we would receive the equivalent when we got to the Ukraine. If we received more, we were to be given a 15-year bank loan in order to finance the difference in value. As it turned out, the house our family received was better than the one we had left. On the other hand, we could receive loans and assistance in building a house if this became necessary. We were also told that we would be free farmers for two years. Another means of persuasion used by the Soviet agitators was that of telling some of the families in our village that they were really of Russian origin and that they should return to their homeland. We were told that it was pointless to bring along anything bulky since everything would be provided when we arrived in the Ukraine.
2. We arrived in the Village of Podtsurkovo near Zdolbunovo in the Rovno oblast in February 1947. Our disillusionment with the Soviet regime began as soon as we crossed the border and began to feel the weight of Soviet authoritarianism, but it was then too late to do anything about it.
3. The village of Podtsurkovo had been populated by about 60 families, all but two of which were Czechs. These were people who had emigrated to this area years before, in the days of the Tsar. Some time before we arrived, they asserted that they were Czech nationals and demanded to be repatriated, since they disliked the Soviet regime. A few of these families were still in Podtsurkovo when we arrived. They were afraid to tell us what conditions would be like for us, but we already had some inkling of it. We tried to talk to the Soviet authorities and tell them we wanted to see the Soviet agitators who had made all the glowing promises to us in Czechoslovakia, but we never saw them again. It was impossible to talk with

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those Soviets. Whatever we said, they would evade the issue and bring up something else, so that it was impossible to establish rapport with them. In answer to our request for the things we had been promised, they told us that the Soviets themselves were in dire need and could spare us nothing. As a consequence we had no seed and our family could only plant 1½ hectares of spring crops that first year, out of 6½ hectares of land that had been put at our disposal. When we arrived, the family that had previously occupied this farm had planted winter crops of wheat, barley, oats etc. on about 2½ hectares which we harvested in July 1947. The yield was fairly good that first year - about 25 quintals of wheat to the hectare. We had one hectare of wheat, one-half hectare of rye, less than one-half hectare of potatoes and the rest miscellaneous.

3. We shared the village of Podtsurkovo with some Ukrainian families who arrived shortly after we Czechs. These Ukrainians had formerly lived around Lublin, west of the Bug river in Poland. As I understood it, they left Poland around 1945-1946 for a variety of reasons. It was rumored that some had been driven out by the local Poles, some had hoped to find a better life in the USSR, and some had been forced by Soviet authorities to settle in the Ukraine. Those families that eventually came to our village had at first been settled in the area of Zhitomir-Kherson-Zaporozhe. Finding conditions intolerable there, and seeking to avoid death by starvation, they arbitrarily pulled up and left, ending up in Podtsurkovo. I am not sure what their exact legal position was at the time. They had been kolkhoz members and were liable to prosecution for leaving without authorization. However, I have the impression that the regime was too shaky at the time to impose control in that area, and if the people had not been so weakened with hunger, they could have successfully staged a local revolt. Since we Czechs disliked administrative and political activities, these Ukrainians soon assumed all responsibility in this work. They did the same as we did - taking over the houses and fields of the Czechs who had formerly been there. They were quite crowded however, living two and three families to a house.

4. As early as the Fall of 1947 we were subject to propaganda on the advantages of a collective farm economy with a view to persuading us to join a kolkhoz. However, we were unresponsive. During the harvest season, in July 1949 the Ukrainians in our village were given the alternative of joining the kolkhoz or going to prison. It was possible to apply this kind of pressure because they had illegally left kolkhozes around the Zhitomir-Kherson-Zaporozhe area, and were subsequently subject to prosecution. In neighboring villages some of the peasants refused to join the kolkhoz and were sent to prison, and then the rest gave in and joined. In 1950, in a neighboring village, those who did not join the kolkhoz did not have the right to till land, and consequently, half the acreage went unplanted. In our village, everyone joined the kolkhoz by the Fall of 1950. The most effective means of forcing our farmers into the kolkhoz was the imposition of heavy taxes and assessments. In 1947, we only paid taxes in kind and not at an established rate. However, in the Fall of 1947 we succeeded in planting most of our acreage in winter crops and by 1948 we had to pay taxes based on sown acreage. By 1949, we had the following Government procurement quotas for our family property:

grains: out of approximately 100 harvested quintals - 69 had to be delivered to the State

potatoes: out of about 80 harvested quintals - 40 had to be delivered to the State.

legumes: out of about 15 quintals harvested - 10 were delivered to the State.

In addition we were assessed for 270 liters of milk and 125 kilograms of meat from our one cow. This of course had to be purchased on the open market by us and then delivered to the State. And finally, we were assessed 5,200 rubles in money. In order to pay this, we sold our horse for 2,100 rubles, and our cow for 1,600 rubles. We received 400 rubles for the grain we had delivered to the State at State prices. These taxes were obviously designed to force our family to join the kolkhoz. We did manage to pay all our taxes that year, but only at the price of many hungry days for our family. In May, 1950 those who still had not joined the kolkhoz were obliged to pay even heavier taxes, while the kolkhoz had a comparatively lighter assessment which was easier to pay for the individual families comprising the kolkhoz. (Although they were obliged to sell some of their grain to buy certain livestock which the kolkhoz was obliged to possess.) This was a hint to those who had still not joined that it would be easier for them if they did join. In 1950, we were told to deliver 90 quintals of grain, and to pay 9,300 rubles in currency. To give an idea of how exorbitant this tax was, our house in the village was only assessed at 19,000 rubles, which meant that we paid a tax of 50% of the value of our house in one year. We obviously had no means to pay such a tax, so we were forced to join the kolkhoz. My father complained about his treatment, and stated that he wanted to go back to Czechoslovakia with his family and for this he was arrested and exiled

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